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# Ruptures and Junctures: Reinventing and Repossessing the Diasporic Self In Ramabai Espinet's The Swinging Bridge

Judith Misrahi-Barak

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*Repenser la diversité :*  
*le sujet diasporique*

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MAQUETTE :  
Katia DICK, Sabine TANGAPRIGANIN  
BUREAU TRANSVERSAL DES COLLOQUES, DE LA RECHERCHE ET DES PUBLICATIONS

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# **Ruptures and Junctures: Reinventing and Repossessing the Diasporic Self In Ramabai Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge***

*Judith Misrahi-Barak  
Université Paul-Valéry, Montpellier 3*

**Abstract:** Even though diasporic existence is often steeped in alienation and loss, fragmentation and mourning, the diasporic paradigm may also be shaped in a more creative and diverse way, reaching beyond the chasms of historical and geographical dislocation. Ramabai Espinet, born in Trinidad from Indian ancestors and living in Canada, has explored multiple itineraries on the path to diasporic self-empowerment. By using the letter and the cinematographic image both as themes and rhetorical tools in her novel *The Swinging Bridge*, Espinet has opened up a renewed space of creation, restructuring the perspective her fictional character has on her own life. Returning to a certain number of geographical and symbolical sites is indeed necessary to evolve a new perception of the world and the self, a new *place-time*.

The migrations from Africa, Asia and Europe *towards* the Caribbean, and the migrations *from* the Caribbean to Canada, the United States and Europe have created a dynamics that cannot be found elsewhere, a *translation* that many writers from the Caribbean have discovered to be enabling rather than merely destructive. People who are *borne across the world* are also *born* across the world, a second birth that does not have to be a mutilation.<sup>1</sup> To examine this individual and collective construct of resilience and creativity, I would like to focus on Ramabai Espinet's novel *The Swinging Bridge* (2003). Born in Trinidad from Indian ancestors but living in Canada, Espinet has explored the multiple itineraries chosen by women on the path to self-empowerment. The double-entry diaspora, or

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<sup>1</sup> “[H]aving been borne across the world, we are translated men.” Salman Rushdie (*Imaginary Homelands*, 17).

double-bound diaspora<sup>2</sup> she belongs to provides a very apt frame within which to evolve her own freedom, within what Myriam Chancy has called “productive contradictions” (title of Chapter One in *Searching for Safe Spaces – Afro-Caribbean Women in Exile*).

I would like to examine how the duality that may seem at first sight to give its backbone to Espinet’s novel is but a gateway towards a more complex and multiple energy articulating the necessity to think beyond the binary. It is built around visual and mental perception, and relies on a strong memorial construct that is woven into the present, giving it its shape and meaning. We will see how the perception, and conception, of time are enabled by the construction of a certain space in order to reach a place of one’s own. It is my hypothesis that the combination and interconnection of space and time in the novel constitutes a highly diasporic *place-time* in which to meander and reinvent the self.

The narrative goes beyond the apparent binariness of time and space (past vs present, home country vs host country, individual vs community). In *The Swinging Bridge*, Mona, whose ancestors arrived in Trinidad from India at the time of indentureship, lives in Canada. She is forced back to her native Trinidad by her dying brother, Kello, also living in Canada, who asks her to be his proxy in a deal over the land he wants to bring back into the family before he dies, so as to correct what went off course when their father sold their property in order to move to San Fernando. If Mona accepts to act as Kello’s proxy, it is also because he is her “second self” (51) and because she has not settled her own score with their father. But her father has “let go” (81), and the story is now hers. The narrative is indeed hers, one of reclaiming. The upcoming death of the brother brings about the reluctant revisiting of the past and more important, the repossessing of the present. Her temporary return to Trinidad enables her to open a new space of reconnection: through the untold stories of her ancestors, through the homage paid to the women in her family, who migrated from India to the Caribbean, and through the unearthing of personal, family and collective archives, Mona will reconstruct herself. To do so, she will need the figure of her great-grandmother, Gainder, the epitome of the Indian free woman and one whose story Mona tries to reconstruct and tell at last.

The novel starts in, and from, confusion and chaos, secrets and void, a feeling of being unlocated: “a state of suspension” (27), “uncertainty” (131), “perpetual uncertainty” (28), “suspended in mid-air” (79), “[and] in time” (132). The novel could not have been anything but a first-person narrative. Mona wonders who she is and whether she has “even made a life

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<sup>2</sup> The first time I heard this expression of “double-bound diaspora” being used, was by Roger Jeffery (Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Edinburgh), and it seems a very apt phrase to refer to the Caribbean, particularly when speaking of the Indo-Caribbean community for instance, emigrating from India to the Caribbean in the nineteenth century, then to Canada in the twentieth century.

for [herself]" (94). She is not "rooted" like her cousin Bess who has never left Trinidad. It is the intrusion of a disturbing element in her not-so-well-ordered life that ushers in a questioning and a new perspective that is going to take her a few steps backward, and a few steps forward, in her life: the dying brother provokes Mona's unexpected return to her native Trinidad. The phrase that is used by Mona, "sloughing off [...] memories" (121), shapes the whole narrative –she is *sloughing off* her former life, slipping onto another level, empowered.

So as to understand how this *sloughing off* and rebirth take shape for Mona through her body, psyche and mind, I want to focus first on the letters that are frequently inserted in the narrative. Separate from the physical being only in appearance, they contribute to bringing the past back to the surface. It makes the body present through and beyond its absence, and gives the timeline a highly complex dimension. This will then enable me to foreground what links the body's experience of diasporic space and the perception of self in diasporic time, i.e. the image in motion as it is framed in *The Swinging Bridge*. Both the letter and the cinematographic image are ruptures *and* junctures in space and time, creating a specific place.<sup>3</sup>

Within that narrative structure, the reader soon notices that letters pepper Espinet's novel. Letters function on a thematic level of reference first: allusions to letters are made in the course of the novel. Kello is said for instance to write letters to his mother when he arrives in Canada (161); among the shop books of her grand-mother that Mona finds at the end of the novel, songs, recipes and letters are included (271-273).

However, if letters function on the thematic level, they function even more powerfully on the narratological and rhetorical level: letters are actually inserted within the text. Pushing and pulling the text forward and backward, letters are sent from beyond the past and enlighten the present, contributing to its repossession. Let us take the example of the scene in the attic, when Mona is literally *cleaning out her closet*. It produces the impression that her present expands and deepens with her increasing knowledge of what went before, as she reads the letters that her father had sent to the newspapers in protest against the situation of the Indo-Caribbeans in 1960s Guyana (72-76): "Remembering that face as I sat in my parents' attic, scrolling down the years, hearing their voices echo in my head and holding these clippings of a young man's futile rage in my hands, I saw the Da-Da that I had never understood then" (78). Within the same

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<sup>3</sup> I will adopt Yi-Fu Tuan's definition of place in comparison with space: "Place then is composed of both culturally created and natural elements, intertwined and inseparable for human identity: [Place] is made up of experiences, mostly fleeting and undramatic, repeated day after day and over the span of years" (*Space and Place*, 183). Place is the way space is perceived and organised by human subjectivity once it has been modified by experience, the perception of time, affect, etc.



chapter, and the same diegetic space, a different perception of time opens up, leading to an alternative perception of self. Mona suddenly finds herself in another *place-time*. The two timelines clash one against the other and intertwine, a time when “Da-Da was still wrestling with everything” (72) and a time when Mona’s life is “still hanging suspended in mid-air, waiting and watching for some twist of fortune” (79).

In the attic, Mona also finds love letters written to her grandfather, Pappy, by his “bamboo wife”, the Indian wife with whom he was unofficially married before his official wedding. She writes to him after Mama’s death and signs, “I remain, Your living wife, Etwaria” (65). Again, “the mementos, the letters and prizes from a past time” (62) hark back to the layers of time and history that are superimposed in the narrative. Mona reads letters that were not addressed to her in the first place, and she gains a new understanding of the present through the *borrowing* of the past.

More generally speaking, the epistolary mode is what provides many diasporic texts with their pivot.<sup>4</sup> A real and metaphoric object that travels across water and land while their authors cannot, the letter is the diasporic object *par excellence*. The diasporic construction of self, or “diaspora literacy”, is not only visible in the lay-out on the page and through the space and time schemes in the general economy of the narrative, it also takes shape and makes sense through the multiple combinations of writing, sending, receiving and reading letters. The letter is also that ultimate space in which another period is encapsulated, that space of a gap to be bridged or to remain disjointed, discrepant, in *décalage* to borrow a word and concept used by Brent Edwards in *The Practice of Diaspora*.<sup>5</sup> Representing a rift and a rupture, they are also junctures in space and time. The letter is the artefact that represents, in Myriam Chancy’s words, “reunification through dispersion”. In the construction of the diasporic self through its fictional representation, the presence of letters and letter-writing belongs to the very structure of the novel even if it may appear scant and unimportant at first sight.

<sup>4</sup> The epistolary object, as it is used by Dionne Brand, Myriam Chancy, Edwidge Danticat, Ramabai Espinet, Marie-Elena John, or Gisèle Pineau, constitutes the main element of analysis of my article “Diasporic Agency and the Power of Literary Form in Caribbean Literature”, in *Atlantic Studies* 9.4 (2012). A few paragraphs have been borrowed for the purposes of this chapter entirely devoted to *The Swinging Bridge*.

<sup>5</sup> Brent Edwards notes that the term diaspora necessarily “involves a process of linking or connecting across gaps –a practice we might term *articulation*” (11). He adds: “If a discourse of diaspora articulates difference, then one must consider the status of that difference –not just linguistic difference but, more broadly, the trace or the residue, perhaps, of what resists or escapes translation. Whenever the African diaspora is articulated [...] these social forces leave subtle but indelible effects. Such an unevenness or differentiation marks a constitutive *décalage* in the very weave of the culture, one that cannot be either dismissed or pulled out” (13).

Isabel Carrera Suarez, in her article “Epistolary Traditions in Caribbean Diasporic Writings: Subversions of the Oral/Scribal Paradox in Alecia McKenzie’s ‘Full Stop’” claims that “Caribbean literature offers relatively few examples of the epistolary genre in prose, despite abundant writing from and on exile” (179). She then devotes the first part of her article to the oral and poetic genres that have included the epistolary form.<sup>6</sup> Carrera Suarez insists that the use of the epistolary form, being “firmly grounded in the oral” (183) is to be expected in the poetic form but also adds that “it is slightly surprising that the short narrative, better suited to the epistolary form than is the novel, provides relatively few texts structured by means of an exchange of letters” (179-180). The three remarkable exceptions she notes are Olive Senior’s short stories “Ascot” and “Bright Thursdays” as well as Jamaica Kincaid’s “Letter from Home”, and she goes on to examine McKenzie’s “Full Stop”.

As a complement to the work Carrera Suarez has already done, I would like to throw light on the inclusion of the epistolary in the novel, which I don’t think is so infrequent in Caribbean literature. Far from thinking that “Perhaps the overdetermined European genre of the eighteenth-century epistolary novel, whose context differed so radically from that of Caribbean diasporas, has acted as a deterrent...” (Suarez, 179), I would say on the contrary that the epistolary is one more way of *writing back* while including the diasporic body in the conversation. Trans-oceanic and trans-atlantic diasporic construction is to be shaped through the very literary form that its narratives adopt, and letters are a means of underscoring the gap that has not been bridged. In his article about J. E. Wideman’s novel *The Cattle Killing* and the use of the letter, Michel Feith formulates this idea by speaking of the “joint poetics of the semantic gap and the time lag,” as well as of “a poetics of the gap, which decenters all the subjectivities these texts express and produce” (“A Chain of Letters,” 108; 113). Is one as autonomous as one believes oneself to be? Is one separate? Does one only exist in the unbridgeable space that is actually opened and closed again by the letters? Espinet shows on the contrary that the gap and the absence are instrumental in the empowerment she is aiming at.

Letters are the concrete traces of another era left in an artefact that exists in space, and they point to a highly specific treatment of time in its relationship to space in *The Swinging Bridge*. One of the most significant and complex features of the novel is its narrative treatment of time –it is highly symbolical too since “so little of it was left” (199). The tempo of the narrative is accelerated or decelerated according to the diegetic needs. Indeed, the reader follows the development of the narrative through the

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<sup>6</sup> Carrera Suarez focuses on Louise Bennett’s “Miss Lou” letters, Una Marson’s “Quashie comes to London”, James Berry’s *Lucy’s Letters and Loving*, Linton Kwesi Johnson’s “Sonny’s Letter, Anti-Sus Poem”, Fred D’Aguiar’s *Mama Dot*, and David Dabydeen’s “Coolie Son [the Toilet Attendant Writes Home]”.

swift and fluid alternation between story-time (the chronological axis that events would have followed if they had been taking place in real life, ie Mona in Toronto and Montreal, involved in a film project) and text-time (the events as they are organised in the text by the writer, ie the inclusions in italics of the passages about the history of the *kala pani*, at the beginning of each of the three parts of the novel; the childhood memories that are projected onto Mona's psyche and onto the page; all the pauses in the text), the two clashing and combining with each other, smoothly. The pace of the novel is that of the trains taking Mona back and forth between Montreal where she lives and Toronto where her brother Kello is dying of AIDS, as well as the movement that takes her from Canada to Trinidad and back. But the movements in space are duplicated by the movements in time, through mind and memory, and such movements also endow the novel with its energy and fluidity, while enabling Mona to repossess her present.

The multiple criss-crossings in *The Swinging Bridge* between story and text, present, and past memory, between character and narrator, between Trinidad, Canada and India, away from any binary relation, a process which can be taken as an expression of the ways the narrative uncovers discrepancies and rifts while simultaneously sewing them back up together –ruptures and junctures. This complex sense of diasporic duration is given through the very structure of the narrative and the way it organises space and place in relation to time.

Part One of the novel, entitled “Borrowed Time”, takes place diegetically in Canada but alternates with memories from Mona's childhood in Trinidad. Part Two, entitled “Manahambre Road” sees Mona going back to Trinidad but keeps up the alternation between the two time and space schemes. The openings of the chapters are quite telling as to the importance of time in the novel, be it on macro or micro scales. Here are a few instances of the opening lines of the twenty-five chapters: “The train entered Ontario” (26), “The next day I went with Babsie to visit Kello at the hospital” (51), “Having agreed to go to Trinidad I found myself eager to see the land again, to finalize the deal” (61), “Evenings were the hardest” (94), “On the Sunday night when I left for Trinidad I went to bed very late” (108), “Any minute now” (120, the first chapter of Part Two), followed by “I spent the next two days suspended in time” (132) and “I returned to Toronto”.

At the beginning of each of the three parts (“Borrowed Time”, “Manahambre Road” and “Caroni Dub”) a couple of pages in italics provide the reader with the context, both historical and personal (the crossing of the *kala pani*, the arrival in Trinidad of the grandparents). The fact that those passages are in the present tense renders more complex the sense of being in time and deepens it. Moreover, in the fragment of diary that is inserted at the beginning of Chapter One, and dated “January 15, 1995”, the reader is granted access to a kind of moment that is akin to a

standstill motion in time, even if only because it is also the present tense that is used:

Mona Singh. That's me. I live in the eye of a storm. My whole life arches backwards and forwards according to the speed of the gust around me. In the centre, near the eye, in the place where I live, it is still. A small mercy.  
(5)

This chapter, the first one, begins in an ambivalent way: it is anchored in story-time since it corresponds to the moment when Kello's illness is revealed and the story starts –it is dated “January 15, 1995”. Yet it is in the present tense since it is a fragment from Mona's diary. As such, it is also text-time and disrupts the chronological axis of the events of the story. It is this pure contradiction that the narrative strives to approach. The present tense is being used both for the collective historical past and for the personal present, which participates in the construction of story-time versus text-time. In fact, the present tense in the novel is often used to bring in the past, while the past simple is used to focus on Mona's present in the fiction. Let us examine for a while how both movements contribute to the emergence of a specific *place-time* for Mona. Before taking the paradigm of dreams, which is most significant in that respect, I want to mention a passage in Chapter Nineteen, almost at the end of the novel, that has a highly ambiguous status. It is a page in italics:

*Mornings find Grandma Lil lifting her skirts carefully as she tiptoes through the back door to meet him in the farthest corner of the teak forest. They lie on burlap bags that he brings tied into a tight bundle. He unties and spreads them on the grass, where she lies and stretches her arms, her legs, arching up to meet the sky in him, the horizon at their back measuring the slow beat of sunlight rising over the cane fields below. [...]  
Lily, my Grandma Lil, yearning to rise over rooftops and kitchens and dirty washtubs, rising in rebellion against the marriage they would make for her, against Aunt Alice, Myrtle, Sweetie, and all the other children to come.  
(261)*

This passage refers to the forbidden love story that was alluded to above, between Grandma Lil and Devindra. It is obviously Mona thinking in the present tense, dreaming about her Grandma Lil, extracting herself from story-time and stepping into text-time, but almost as if she was duplicating the diary of her grandmother. The homage she pays her grandmother reconstitutes Grandma Lil's life, projecting an image onto Mona's present. The space of the text receives both timelines, allowing them to be swayed by one another.

Just like the trope of the letter, the dreams that are recounted in the narrative underline the extent of the protagonist's temporal fluctuations, as the narration oscillates between the present tense, the present continuous

and the past simple. In Part Two the dreams stream back into Mona's psyche once she is back in Trinidad. The first night at her cousin Bess's house, Mona "dreamed of the old house" (126). The whole dream is recounted in the simple past: "At first it was exactly as I remembered it. It stood with two or three unevenly spaced hillocks surrounding it [...]. I walked to the side [...]. Kello was waiting at the top of the stairs and greeted me kindly" (126-127). When the narration is interrupted by "I woke up suddenly. It was the middle of the night and pitch black" (128), the reader believes s/he is back in story time. Voices break through, there are terrible sounds, screams are piercing the night, Mona is hearing a heated conversation in the room next door. Then:

In the morning I woke up with the brightness of daylight flooding the room, banishing all reverberations of those strange sounds I had heard in the night. [...]

I put out my arm and touched the pillows, the matching rose-toned sheets, the embroidered spread. It took me several minutes to reorient myself. Everything was so near, so vivid –the decades between then and now had fallen away in the middle of the night. It was morning, promising a day of brilliant sunshine, but I was in my cousin Bess's house. And suddenly I knew that it was in this house that I had first heard those night sounds. I heard them when we were pitching about from pillar to post, when Muddie and Uncle Baddall had the fight in the kitchen, when I really began to hate Uncle Baddall. (130-131)

The two timelines merge together, evolving a new *place-time*, separate from the two timelines it is made of. Disparate elements fall into place.

Another instance of this specific *place-time* emerging through dreams occurs in Part Three with a dream which alternates simple present and present continuous, and where the preterite is the tense that goes back to story-time and to the present of Mona in the fiction:

I slept with a soundness that I had not known for weeks. My dreams were mapped by a spotlight moving backwards rapidly, leafing through stacked papyrus folios half-lying in the shallows near the shoreline of a turquoise sea.

I am driving on the well-cut new highway that joins the two cities of my life, Port-of-Spain and San Fernando. I apprehend a newly prescribed order. [...]

And along the highway a dog is running at the side. The day is hot, a hot dry Sunday afternoon, and she is in panic. [...] She belongs to no one; she is going nowhere. [...] I read the panic in the dog's eyes.

Later I return as evening is shifting through the canes. [...] There is a small dog in a heap at the side of the road. It might be her. I don't know.

I awoke to find myself in tears. [...] The dreams I had were of life breaking apart, of not caring anymore. [...]

Then I recalled another dream that I had that night about a man from Iere Village. (264-265)

In that second dream, embedded in the first one, she sees a man with a broken arm:

That body, once sinuous, had perhaps lain fully up, another body. Once perhaps, a woman might have spent time touching his lank discoloured hair, teasing the nervous muscle at the side of his mouth. That hair, now long and unkempt, falls down the side of his face, masking his beautiful cat's eyes, his hawk's nose.

And suddenly I sat up in bed. The cat's eyes, the hawk's nose –those were not my words. They were words from Muddie's story of Grandma Lil's first love, the boy Devindra, whom everyone knew as Davy. (266)

When Mona speaks with Bess in the morning, the mention of the dream and of the man with "his beautiful cat's eyes, his hawk's nose" brings out the family secret that Devindra, Grandma Lil's forbidden love, was Bess's grandfather:

I stared at Bess blankly, trying to follow her words. I knew from Muddie that the still born baby was Davy's child. I knew that Bess was Sweetieboy's outside child, but I had never heard that Davy was also Bess's grandfather. Did Muddie know? So many secrets in such a tiny place. (267)

The divergent levels of reality, the multiple layers of truth, materialized by the different verb tenses, generate a new kind of consciousness in Mona, the present duplicating the past and bringing it to another level.

This particular treatment of time may well be what Deleuze, thirty years ago, used to call *un cristal de temps*, a time cristal.<sup>7</sup> Mona, as a protagonist, looks at herself from inside and from outside, as if looking at a scene from a crystal ball. There is something acutely diasporic in the way the present duplicates itself, when the immediate moment grasps the past it used to be. Mona's fragment of diary at the beginning of the novel is reverberated at the end of the novel in the fragments of her Grandma Lil's diary, in which Mona finds echoes, literally speaking since they are songs, of her great-grandmother, Gainder. It is Gainder's story of migration and indenture that Mona is trying to recompose, editing her back into history and editing herself back into her own life. Past and present, again, echo and reverberate.

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<sup>7</sup> One can refer to Gilles Deleuze, "Cours de Vincennes sur l'image-temps et l'image-mouvement". <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/8355994/Gilles-Deleuze-Cours-de-Vincennes-sur-limage-temps-et-limage-mouvement>>, accessed May 1, 2012; as well as *Cinéma 2 – L'Image-Temps* (Paris : Editions de Minuit, 1985).

This is where it is essential to understand how film and the cinematographic image are brought in and covertly shape the meaning of the novel and the perception of time. The meaning of Mona's life and her understanding of self can only take shape in the way she inhabits space and time *through* the mental visual image, an image which is never physically or directly visual in the novel but which is indirectly, or mnemonically, visual. The grid of interpretation that Deleuze provides is extremely useful here. What Deleuze used to call *l'image-temps*, or time-image, can only be obtained through *l'image-mouvement*, or movement-image. Time is to be grasped through the composition of space and movement, something that Deleuze calls *cinéchronie*.

References to the visual mode and the cinematographic image are often used as a theme in Espinet's novel even though this is not done in an overt way. Terms like "motion", "recede", "edit", "montage", "shots", "unreeling" etc, can be found in abundance. It is certainly not by chance that the protagonist's profession is that of film director, propping up ideas and emotions within a certain frame and from a certain angle. Professionally speaking, Mona is involved at the beginning of the novel in a research for a documentary film directed by a friend of hers on the lives of Haitian women in Montreal. Her intention was to include Cécile Fatiman, the only Haitian woman involved in the Haitian revolution but her friend finally makes the decision to "edit" her out of the film, "[editing] her out of history" (11) a second time.

Mona has a project of her own:

[A]n experimental piece, *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*, using the T. S. Eliot poem in combination with live jazz, shot in the streets of Montreal. [...] I imagined a film or a photographic essay, but was never able to secure the means for devoting myself to my own project. (7)

Her project will in fact be shaped thanks to a treble detour: being her brother's proxy over the deal for the land, searching through the archives to reconstitute her great-grandmother's story, and finally, processing the present through her memories and images of the past.<sup>8</sup>

The visual image being inserted in the text thematically, imaginatively, ekphrastically almost, is another way of reaching out to another level, beyond the apparent duality of the written word and the mental image. One of the childhood memories Mona has is of her desire for a

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<sup>8</sup> Horatio, Uncle Baddall's illegitimate son, can be perceived in the novel as a carnivalesque image of Mona: he is also involved in reconstructing his family's past and plans to go back to Trinidad, but what he projects is a fantasy image – a buried treasure bequeathed by his father and to be retrieved by himself. A farcical echo of Mona, her Other in more ways than one, he also provides another detour on Mona's road to self-definition.

camera, and of her frustration of getting field glasses instead as a Christmas present:

Everything looked clearer and bigger when I looked through field glasses, and I liked that. [...] But the field glasses were not a camera, and all the snapshots I wanted of objects and places and people came and went in my head in a neverending kaleidoscope, folding and unfolding in crazy sequence. (33-34)

Everything will be “clearer and bigger” but only once Mona as an adult has swapped her field glasses for a camera. As a narrator, she will then speak of the “montage of images [that] bisects [her] life at odd moments [...] unreeling in slow motion” (102).

However, as with the letters, it is narratologically and rhetorically that the inclusion of a cinematographic image and structure is the most powerful in the narrative, dominating it and giving it a turn it would not otherwise have had even if the reader may not realize this at first. The moments when Mona is brought back to her childhood and youth, and to all its traumas (the row between father and son, the attempted rapes), puncture the narrative just as forcefully as the letters but also mould it into a very supple piece of text. These narrative analepses function just like cinematographic flashbacks, emerging from the present and going to the past. Story-time gives way to text-time in a very smooth and seamless way, and vice-versa.

Following up on what has already been said about the structure of the chapters, I simply want to take a few examples. The first flashback, or analepsis, is to be found at the end of Chapter One, when the news of Kello’s dying has reached Mona. Her reflections about Kello’s former status in the family lead her to remember the “big row”, which had produced a radical disagreement between Kello and his father over the sale of the family property in Princes Street. After the sentences “[t]he row happened around Christmas. The year was 1958” (17), the reader realizes a line has been crossed and the narrative has toppled over into a different time-scheme. It remains so until the end of the chapter (15-25). When Chapter Two opens, we are back in story-time: “The train entered Ontario and the landscape changed to bare trees standing in uneven patches of snow” (26). In less than a page, the narrative is back into text-time mode, stepping into another analepsis: “Da-Da had to leave Trinidad, I could see that now” (27-30). The train journey allows images to drift in and out, allowing the narrative to fade in and out just as in a film associating flashbacks, story-time and sometimes even real time. Mona’s body movements on the train, in the city, and more generally her movements in space, produce mind images that are indissociable from her temporal perception of herself.



Immediately after the quote about Mona standing in the eye of the storm, which opens the first chapter, the following passage prolongs the text:

Those were the words I was writing in my notebook early one morning in January when the phone rang and everything in my life turned around. Those old-time words were calling out to me, words like *carilee*, *sem*, *macajuel*, *mammy-sepote*, arising unbidden out of parts of my life no longer in use. Signals, beckoning me into the past. (5)

There is perceptible tension between expressions of movement (“turned around”, “signals”, “beckoning”), and expressions of time (“old-time words”, “into the past”). From what has been said above, one can derive an understanding of the text according to which the perception of the multiple layers of time is gradually formed through the construction of space and motion, as it is organised in the space in the narrative itself. What Deleuze used to call *l’image-temps*, or time-image, can only be formed through *l’image-mouvement*, or movement-image. Time is to be grasped through the composition of space and movement, something that Deleuze calls *cinéchronie*, the image of time as it is extracted from movement-images. Ultimately, it is the space and time of the text itself that prevail.

Through a complex construction of a diasporic *place-time*, *The Swinging Bridge* maps out the multiple and contradictory movements of diaspora, the sense of being physically immersed in the present and the past, combining with a sense of moving forward and backward at the same time. The complex exploration that takes place in Espinet’s novel has only been possible through a text that works its way through a multiplicity of layers and levels. A vision of time is obtained through a vision of space. *L’image-temps* is to be grasped through *l’image-mouvement*. The reconnection with self happens within the frame of an image that reconstructs personal and collective time. In the context of diasporic novels written by women writers who edit and recompose their lives through the texts they write, diasporic time is best explored through diasporic space so as to compose a special place. In the editing process that is at the heart of the reinterpretation of the present, it seemed particularly fitting to foreground the very medium, film, whose complexity has subtly informed Espinet’s writing in *The Swinging Bridge*. Mona, and Espinet, have “connected the dots” (293) and taken on “the back-breaking work of reinvention” (303).

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